

# HPV

## Human Papillomavirus

HPV stands for Human Papillomavirus. It is a virus that lives on the skin and sometimes causes warts. There are many different kinds. They are spread by skin-to-skin contact with someone who has HPV. Some HPV is passed through vaginal, oral, or anal sex. HPV is very contagious. Even people with no visible warts can spread the virus to others.

HPV is a very common STD. Two types are related to cancer, especially cervical cancer in women. Men can get cancer of the anus or penis. Very few people who have HPV will develop cancer, but any sexually active woman should have regular Pap tests to check for any abnormal cells on her cervix.

### Signs and symptoms

Most people do not notice symptoms at all, especially women. Genital warts can appear weeks, months, or years after sex with an infected partner. Genital warts look like other warts. They are small bumps of different sizes, shapes, and colors. They can be hard or soft, pink or gray. They usually appear in groups that look like tiny cauliflower. The warts are not usually painful, although they may itch. Don't treat warts with anything before going to a doctor.

The types of HPV that cause visible warts are not the same as HPV related to cancer.

### Testing

HPV is usually diagnosed by looking at the warts or by an abnormal Pap test. If a woman has an abnormal Pap, her doctor may do more tests to see if she has HPV.

All sexually active women should have regular Pap tests, usually once a year. A Pap test is done by using a swab to get a few cells from the cervix and it doesn't hurt. The swab is sent to a laboratory for testing.

## Treatment

HPV cannot be cured, only treated. However, HPV doesn't always need treatment. The body will often clear the infection on its own, whether the warts are visible or not. If the warts are large and uncomfortable, there are several methods for removal. Freezing is a common way. There is also a gel or cream that can be applied and washed off later. Some medicines should never be used by pregnant women. Be sure to tell your doctor if you are pregnant before having genital warts treated.

It is important to remember that treatment only removes the warts; it does not kill the virus that causes the warts. Many people will get the warts again after treatment.

## Prevention

- **Get vaccinated.** A vaccine is now available that prevents the four most common types of HPV, including two types that are most related to cervical cancer. It is only available for females between the ages of 9 and 26 at this time.
- **Use condoms correctly every time you have sex.** Condoms can provide some protection against HPV if they cover the infected area. Condoms are also good protection against other STDs.
- **Have fewer sex partners.** The more partners you have, the greater your chances of getting HPV or any other STD.
- **Birth control pills do not prevent infection.**

## Learn more about HPV

If you have questions or need more information, contact your doctor, local health department, or community clinic, or call the National STD Hotline at **1-800-227-8922**.

---

For persons with disabilities this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TTY/TDD 1-800-833-6388).



**Dear Colleague,**

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is pleased to provide camera-ready art for printing this educational material. To ensure that the original quality of the piece is maintained, please read and follow the instructions below and the specifications included for professional printing.

- **Use the latest version.** DOH materials are developed using the most current information available, are checked for clinical accuracy, and are field tested with the intended audience to ensure they are clear and readable. DOH programs make periodic revisions to educational materials, so please check this web site to be sure you have the latest version. DOH assumes no responsibility for the use of this material or for any errors or omissions.
- **Do not alter.** We are providing this artwork with the understanding that it will be printed without alterations and copies will be free to the public. Do not edit the text or use illustrations or photographs for other purposes without first contacting us. Please do not alter or remove the DOH logo, publication number or revision date. If you want to use a part of this publication for other purposes, contact the Office of Health Promotion first.
- **For quality reproduction:** Low resolution PDF files are intended for black and white or color desktop printers. They work best if you are making only one or two copies. High resolution PDF files are intended for reproducing large quantities and are set up for use by professional offset print shops. The high resolution files also include detailed printing specifications. Please match them as closely as possible and insist on the best possible quality for all reproductions.

If you have questions, contact:

Office of Health Promotion

P.O. Box 47833 Olympia, WA 98504-7833

(360) 236-3736

**Sincerely,**

**Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team**